



Negotiating Mothering and Academic Work: A Mixed Methods Intersectional Feminist Study

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Parent Connection series. Abstract design made of graceful profile
lines of mother and child on the subject of parenting, motherhood,
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PREFACE

It is a well-rehearsed argument to say that the challenge of mothering while pursuing an academic career is one of the most significant obstacles to women's success in the academy.

This Report details the results of focus group research carried out with academic mothers at WSU, as well as survey research from a national sample of academic mothers across Australian Universities. The results show that many of our most stubbornly entrenched inequalities do not simply follow gendered fault lines, but rather care fault lines; with mothers doubly disadvantaged in academia by their gender and caring role.

Indeed, there are deeply problematic institutionalised practices of objectification and discrimination towards mothering in academia. The results of our research show:

- A neo-liberal and patriarchal academic culture that devalues mothering through the reification of a disembodied masculinised worker;
- A culture that maternalises administration and academic housework, and limits women to their discursive 'fit' while simultaneously profiting from women's discursive gender roles;
- A culture that trivialises the maternal subject through a prevailing discourse of scepticism around maternity leave;
- And a culture that erases women's autonomy in the academy upon maternity.

Our results also show the material effects of these practices on the everyday experiences and career opportunities of mothers in the academy, including: being 'micromanaged'; passed over for opportunities; missing out on meetings; being positioned as inconsiderate or expecting special treatment; and being relegated to the 'institutional sidelines' or research 'slow lane'.

Not surprisingly, such experiences have profound effects for mothers' sense of self – including a deeply felt sense of discrimination and injustice, guilt, and conflict; especially when practices of exclusion are normalized and embedded in the academic landscape to the extent that they are invisible.

Our results relating to institutional support show that there is an ideological disconnect between gender equity policies in academia and mother's ability to adopt these policies in practice. They also show that most mothers are unsure about the availability of many formal policies, and that whilst flexible work arrangements are positioned by academic mothers as necessary to effectively negotiate mothering and academic work, such arrangements can have unintentional negative gendered consequences.

Finally, our results show significant associations between academic work, self-care activities, and mothers mental health and well-being – with the demands of academic work and mother work limiting women's leisure time with family, sleep,

self-care practices, and time available to take care of their physical and mental health.

Academic mothers are not simply victims of the patriarchal norms inscribed in the academy or of the constraints of mothering. Our results show that these mothers actively negotiate these norms and constraints to be successful in the academy. However, it is the very fact that academic mothers must engage in this negotiation to survive in academia that is problematic. If we are taking seriously the idea that mothering is a barrier to success in the academy, I would suggest that a radical shift in the cultural landscape of academia is required.



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BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The challenge of mothering while pursuing an academic career is one of the most significant obstacles to women's success in the academy (Jensen 2014). Research examining the connection between parenting and academic career progression has consistently identified a range of problematic, and deeply gendered, inequities unique to being a mother in academia.

Mothers face structural, institutional, cultural, and symbolic barriers that render them unable - and often unwilling - to adhere to the masculine norm of the 'ideal' worker (Hunter and Leahey 2010), and the male life patterns (Santos and Cabral-Cardoso 2008) typical of a patriarchal and neo-liberalised University culture (Jensen 2014). The neo-liberalised University culture is growing, evident through the ever-increasing focus on administration and cost cutting, teaching evaluations, dependence on merit pay, and university rankings in order to stay competitive (Baker, 2009). As such, research outputs and publication rates are being used by university hierarchies to judge an academic's proficiency and employability, and by governments to rank and allocate funding (Broadbent, Troup, Strachan, 20013; Doidge & Doyle, 2020b).

This leaves mothers experiencing significant academic career penalties, including: disruptions to the procurement of tenure (Kahn 1993); workplace 'othering' and abjectionification (Huopalaimeu and Satama 2018); diminished

productivity (Hunter and Leahey 2010); limited voice in the academic landscape (Isgro and Castaneda 2015); and distress associated with negotiating the competing and contradictory demands of mothering and academia (Young and Wright 2001). Women's choices around family planning and the timing of childbirth in academia are often contingent upon their tenure status (Armenti 2004), and the gendered division of domestic and caring labour hampers mothers' academic career progression (Crabb and Ekberg 2014): women spend significantly more time in childcare and household activities than men, and have less partner support than men in parenting demands (O'Laughlin and Bischoff 2005).

Many universities have formalised policies and practices to redress gender inequities and barriers to career progression. As a 'sector leader in gender equality', Western Sydney University is no exception – providing and promoting gender equity policies and supports, including parental leave, phased-return-to-work, on campus childcare facilities, flexible working practices, and family leave (Marchant and Wallace 2013, Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) 2018).

There are clear advantages associated with these policies, however, there is evidence that formalised institutional support (re)creates gender inequities (Marsh 2015), and is sometimes ineffective or unaccessed (Roberat and Erskine 2005). For example, flexible working arrangements tend to (re)create normative gender practices – with mothers more inclined than fathers to adopt

such arrangements (Armenti 2004, Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) 2018).

Flexible arrangements also mean that mothers often complete their paid work in their home environment in the evening or weekends. This is an environment where mothers may also need to address demands for attention from children/ partners (Marchant and Wallace 2013), and - unlike academic fathers – this paid work is carried out *in addition* to the socio-gendered expectation that mothers also take primary responsibility for unpaid domestic and caring tasks (Drago and Williams 2000). At the same time, research shows that academic mothers are concerned about the consequences of accessing institutional supports, for instance being considered less serious about their work (Heijstra, Morsdóttir et al. 2017).

Research comparing the experiences of working mothers and childfree women in the workplace

consistently affirms that these concerns are legitimate, with women in the academy undoubtedly subject to the 'motherhood penalty' (Kennelly and Spalter-Roth 2006, Baker 2010, Budig, Misra et al. 2012)



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RESEARCH DESIGN AND QUESTIONS

Adopting a mixed methods design, informed by Intersectional Feminism, this project conducted 6 focus group interviews (N=27), and a national online survey of mothers in academia (N=134) to answer the following research questions:

1. What are women's experiences of negotiating mothering and academic work?
2. What are women's experiences of mothering and academic career progression?
3. What are women's constructions and experiences of flexible working practices in academia?
4. What proportion of mothers utilize different flexible working practices, and how does this differ for women in sessional, contract and continuing academic roles?
5. How do women's experiences of negotiating mothering, academic work, and institutional gender equality policies impact their mental health and well-being?



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METHOD

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURE

After ethical approval was received, participants were recruited by snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling via email invitation. Prior to participating, interested participants were asked to fill out a short demographic and background questionnaire. Recruitment continued until a diverse and inclusive sample of women academics from across disciplines, employed across all academic levels, and across academic employment type (sessional, contractual, or ongoing) was obtained. Participants were reimbursed with a \$40 gift card for participation.

A total of six focus groups were conducted, four were conducted face-to-face while two were conducted via remote conferencing platform Zoom. The focus groups ranged in size from seven to three participants. The focus groups were informal, with the intervention of the facilitator minimal across all six groups. A semi-structured schedule guided the focus groups conversations, with questions about balancing parenting and academic work, gender equity in the workplace, formal and informal supports, and self-care. Focus groups lasted between 90-120 minutes.

Focus group audio data was professionally transcribed, and once transcripts were received identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms assigned. All participants were assigned pseudonyms that preserved their age and cultural identity. All transcripts were edited using conventions such as use of ellipses for long pauses and underlining for emphasis (Bailey 2008). The moderator (author one) was of a similar background to the participants – a strategy to

minimise moderator bias (Smithson 2000), with the same moderator across all the focus groups. Authors two and three acted as observers and note-takers across the focus groups.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-seven academic mothers, aged between thirty to fifty-four, took part in the study. Participants' children ranged in age from one month to twenty- four-years-old. The number of children participants had ranged from one to three.

Fourteen of the participants self-identified as Anglo- Australian, two as British, two as Australian, while the remaining nine participants self-identified as Eurasian, Anglo-American, Malaysian Chinese, Irish-Australian, Indian, Chinese, Afro-Canadian-Australian, Brazilian, and Scottish. Twenty-four participants self-identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual or queer, while one participant did not disclose her sexuality.

Twenty- four of the participants were in a couple relationship, two participants were divorced, while one participant was separated and single. Two participants were level A academics, nine were level B, ten were level C, two were level D, while three were casual academics. No Professors (Level E) who volunteered to participate in the focus groups.

The length of time participants had been employed at the University ranged from less than 2 years to between 10-20 years. Some of the participants were in research intensive positions, others were in teaching-focused positions, whilst most were in mix of teaching, research, and governance roles. Many of the women were involved in, or led large externally funded research projects, were directors

of academic programs, course advisors, or clinic directors.

FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Focus groups were conducted to generate interactive data, and assess how accounts are socially produced, or in other words, 'how people define, discuss, and context issues through social interaction' (Tonkiss 2004, 194). Following Kitzinger (1994) we chose to work largely with pre-existing groups of women who worked at the same University campus location, or who already knew each other through disciplinary alignments. Using pre-existing groups meant that the groups were more or less homogenous and allowed us to 'tap into fragments of interactions that approximated "naturally occurring" data' (Kitzinger 1994, 105).

The fact that most of the participants already knew one another had the advantage of colleagues often being able to relate to incidents that were shared in the workplace, resulting in a kind of public performance of sociality (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2012). Our approach to the analysis was to see the focus groups as constructed collectively where the researcher(s) and participants jointly position themselves in the conversation as well as being constituted by it (Smithson 2000). In this way, we were less interested in the 'real' or 'true' views of the participants, and were more concerned with the way the focus groups generated a joint discourse about mothering in academia.

We adapted Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive and semantic method of thematic analysis to analyse and identify patterns of meaning and the range of 'voices' within the focus groups. All

transcripts were manually coded, with patterns identified through an iterative six-phase process. In the first phase of analysis, we immersed ourselves with the data, through editing, and repetitive and close reading of the transcripts. In the second phase we coded important and recurring data, and noted commonalities and differences within and across focus groups. Some initial codes were 'hidden work/admin', 'hidden work/care work', and 'mental logistics of mothering'.

Codes and all relevant data extracts were then collated, for example, 'hidden work/admin' and 'hidden work/care work' were collated into 'Academic Housework'. Initial themes and sub-themes were created in the third phase of analysis, as we began to merge and discard collated codes. Phase four of analysis involved re-examining themes to determine their accuracy. Before the final phase of write up, and in phase five, we paid particular attention to the 'collective voice' of the focus groups. We assessed such issues as: Was there a dominant voice from each focus group?; What were the normative practices, experiences or discourses that the participants described? We found that each of the focus group conversations were collaborative and tended to construct a consensus, where the collective voice reflected participants' already held opinions *and* was an active product of the group interactions.

ONLINE SURVEY PROCEDURE

Participants for the online survey were also recruited by snowball and purposive sampling via email invitation. The email invitation included a link to the anonymous online survey. The survey included both close-ended and open-ended questions about basic demographic and

background characteristics, their experiences negotiating mothering, academic work, their institutional gender equality policies and initiatives, their utilisation of institutional gender equality provisions, their reasons for utilizing or rejecting these provisions, division of labour at home, self-care activities, as well as an assessment of their mental health and well-being.

ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

A total of 134 participants completed the anonymous national online survey. Eighty-four (63%) of the respondents were Australian-born, with 128 (96%) speaking English at home. One hundred and ten (82%) self-identified as heterosexual, 10 (7%) as bisexual or queer, 4 (3%) as lesbian, with 8 (6%) participants who did not disclose their sexual orientation. One hundred and twenty (90%) respondents were either married or in a relationship, with the remaining 14 (10%) were single, widowed, separated or divorced. In terms of employment status, 85 (63%) were continuing, 37 (28%) were on a contract, 11 (8%) were casual/sessional, and 1 (1%) declined to state.



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ONLINE SURVEY ANALYSIS

The quantitative data from the online survey was analysed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies) and correlational analyses. The qualitative data from the online survey (i.e., quotes from survey responses) were included where relevant in the findings below.

RESULTS

THE GENDERING OF ADMINISTRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The majority of women reported that the daily tasks undertaken in the academy were increasingly reflective of the marketization of university culture with academics “constantly asked to do more with less time (Amelia)” where “the job’s never done” (Kathleen). For these women, doing more with less was attributed to the increasing requirement that academics engage in “administrative and menial stuff” such as “putting out spot fires”, and the need to contribute to the “invisible work” of organisational citizenship, care work, and collegiality; tasks that are “never, ever calculated in our workloads” (Rachel), but which are becoming essential as universities “pivot to become a much more community engaged institution that we’ve been in the past” (Amelia). Such tasks were positioned by most of the women as taking valuable time away from the prioritisation of research in universities, with Citra explaining that “my job is research, but not much of my time is actually spent on research”.

Such accounts are indicative of the way essentialism can play out in the academy, with women more likely than men to be relegated to “academic housework” (teaching communal and pastoral tasks); with such housework seen by universities as less prestigious than research (Heijstra, Steinhorsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2017; O’Brien et al., 2019). This can result in lower publication rates for women academics compared to their male counterparts (Asmar, 1999), and subsequently lowers women’s probability of gaining full-time or permanent employment

(Baker, 2009), demonstrating how the gendered allocation of women to academic housework can impact on performance and achievement. The majority of women also reported experiencing increasing pressure to secure external funding income, publish, and supervise students, with most women rising to the challenge and taking up a subject position of the ideal worker. For example, Citra talking about the “pressure to excel” and to “be the best”, with Rachel stating that “you just have to work harder”.

“If you’ve got a research load, it is that pressure to, you know, excel, and be the best, um, it’s not just going to work and doing your job and going home, but you’ve just got to be the best in everything because if you don’t bring in money then you’re essentially useless to the university and then you get tossed out. That’s the brutal truth of it”.

For most of the women, the marketization of the academy has led to “unreasonable demands”, with many of the increasing administrative and citizenship tasks positioned as gendered in a particular way; one that relates specifically to the maternal subject position where women can find themselves carrying out “mothering stuff at work as well (...) because we’re already doing it in every other bloody component of our lives” (Amelia). For Amelia “the pure amount of administration (...) like it’s just endless in my experience. And I end up feeling like I’m positioned as the mother of the workplace family, all the fucking admin...”, and

Catherine reported that “male people” are not engaging in these tasks to the same extent.

“I’m not going to keep doing these late nights and this extra work when there’s other people.....male people, around me that aren’t doing it. I know what they’re doing and it’s not - it’s benefiting them. So why am I not doing something that’s benefiting me at night.”

Participants, such as Charlotte, also described the “vicious circle” of being given a higher teaching load by the university if they were not producing enough research.

PRACTICES OF MATERNAL PREJUDICE IN ACADEMIA

When asked to describe their experience of being a mother in academic culture, the overwhelming majority of women described implicit as well as overt practices of prejudice and hostility towards mothering. These women reported experiencing these practices only since becoming a mother, a subject position that reportedly “puts you in the slow lane” because “the academy doesn’t value it” (Rachel) - with mothering simply “not a part of the conversation” in academia.

Here we see how ‘familialisation’ (Rose, 1990) constitutes a loss of the autonomous subject, with women coming to be positioned solely as objects for children’s needs rather than people in their own right. That is, they are no longer recognised as the autonomous subject they were prior to having a child, they are now positioned simply as a maternal subject. For many women this had profound implications for their sense of self with some feeling unsupported “as an up-and-coming academic who’s also a mother” (Nancy), some

receiving “that disapproving kind of look” if they “bring kids to work sometimes”, and others feeling “just useless” or “just a uterus with legs, we get treated like that” (Catherine). At the same time, Thandi described still being expected to “function like a man” upon becoming a mother as “children, mothering, parenting all that doesn’t exist” within academia, and went on to say that the idealised academic worker is akin to a “machine”;

“You are a machine. Come to work, act like a machine, don’t do all that stuff that makes you a human; please don’t. Then get the outputs that you need to get, and then continue, as we say.”

In many instances women described experiencing active exclusion from opportunities “because they think she’s not going to be able to do that role because of her circumstances” (Rachel), and as Kelly explained, “they don’t do it to your face, but I guess you don’t get invited to certain meetings sometimes, or they don’t ask you to do something”. Sometimes the scheduling of meetings outside business hours acted to prevent women from attending due to their caring responsibilities. Kimberly describes below a circumstance in which “another woman” “expected” her to attend an early morning work meeting;

“another woman asking me to join a meeting at seven o’ clock and saying that that should be okay. That’s not okay. Unless you want three kids in the background and you’re more than happy, but it’s a bit chaotic at 7:00AM at my house. But the expectation that I could get them up and out and gone and join a Zoom meeting at seven o’ clock – yeah ”.

In other instances, women were subject to overt discrimination, where opportunities “just faded away and didn’t come back” (Rachel), or where women like Kimberly felt discrimination “really deeply”, but also felt that it such discrimination was “invisible enough to go under the carpet for anybody else to have felt. It was a real felt discrimination”. Similarly, Rachel explained how her revealing her pregnancy resulted in a conversation about the forfeiture of a leadership role;

I had someone like call me up and say, “oh hi Rachel, I know you've applied for this job um...but I hear that you're pregnant, so, what do you want me to do about your application?” I just wanted to give you the option of like withdrawing your application”.

Other women described a discourse of skepticism surrounding the validity of their maternity leave amongst colleagues, with such leave positioned as a “break”, “holiday” or “long service leave, as Rachel and Pamela’s conversation highlights below;

“And oh yeah, the other thing that really gets me about the flexibility is the attitude that, you know, maternity leave is like taking long service leave”

“A long traumatic holiday [laughs]”

“Oh, did you have a nice break?” It's like,” no, I had major abdominal surgery and I have not had a night's sleep for the last 10 months. So, if you consider that a break, then, okay”.

INVISIBILISING MOTHERING IN ACADEMIA

The reported practices of implicit and overt discrimination led many women to invisibilise their maternal subjectivity within academia or resulted in them justifying their work practices around their mothering commitments. For example, Katie explained that “I think, to be honest, I’ve hidden a lot if it”. She went on to say that,

“In the past when I was doing drop-offs and things like that, I’ve hidden a lot because I felt, well, my working hours are really 9:00 to 5:00, so if I’m leaving early at 3:00 to pick up my daughter, I shouldn’t be telling anyone that’s what I’m doing. I would just make up when I go home, and I work extra hours anyway. So, that was always my rationale of, okay, I need to hide this, because technically I’m supposed to be around from 9:00 to 5:00”.

Katie went on to describe how keeping mothering invisible was common practice within academia.

“You know what someone said to me once? Don’t tell them you’re at home, like you need that time for looking after your kids or getting them off to school or doing whatever. Tell them you’re at a meeting. I’m like, that just doesn’t sit well with me. I’m looking after my kids, and that should be okay. Full stop”

Some other women reported that when one’s maternal subjectivity is visible within academia, “you’re always worried about how people at work are perceiving you, and whether you do enough work” (Kathleen), or feel as though they must “perpetually justify where you’re going and what you’re doing (...) because you just feel like you get looks” (Kimberly). Kimberly went on to explain that

these “looks” are “subtle” but work to negatively impact the perceived value of the self;

"It feels like there's this invisible expectation that you should be justifying everything that you do, particularly when you come in, you work through that time, you don't have lunch and leave earlier and so forth, because you just feel like you get looks. It's subtle, but it's like, okay, she's off again. She's not joining us for coffee. She's not coming out on a social event after the forum. You feel like you've always got to justify it. Even if no one says anything, you feel like that's what you have to do. How we get past it, I don't know. I guess part of it's how you feel about yourself, and how you're interpreting what's of value around you. But I also think part of it's the subtle things that people do and say around you".

Invisibilising their maternal subjectivity was not always an easy task for women, or an act that was adopted by all of the women. There were a few women, like Rebecca, who said “obviously my kids come first and I’m not ashamed to make that clear with colleagues”, and others who positioned the role of the maternal subject as the most important role with “that relationship with them (children) I think is the most important for me” (Citra). As Lily points out, the responsibility of raising children is not a role she feels the need to apologise for;

"I feel like all of the things that are in the mothering role, you feel like you have to apologise for, and I think, I'm not going to apologise, it's really important to me, and raising decent humans is a really important thing to do."

OSCILLATING BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC AND MATERNAL SELF

In order to negotiate the subject positions of mothers and academics, these women reportedly oscillate between two subject positions - the autonomous self and the maternal self; a circumstance that is fraught with conflict and guilt. Most of the women talked about the difficulty shifting between mothering and academia, with Citra saying “it’s more my identity I still struggle with (...) Every day I’m wondering, can I do this?”, and the difficulty associated with “keeping it all together” and “not going mad”, and Thandi saying that “You come to work you feel useless, you go home you feel useless”. Alice also explained that;

"I just keep thinking about that saying about supposed to work like you don't have to parent, parent like you don't have to work. I think that tension all the time just feeling like you're doing a crap job of both because you're trying to do a good job of both..."

Some women talked about how much easier it would be if they were firmly aligned only with one subject position - in this case below - the maternal subject. Citra said;

"Some mornings I think, "you know what, I'm going to just chuck it all in and I'm just going to be one of those mums in the playground" and um, and you know a whole chunk of my life would just be so much easier. And then I think, "well, would it really? Is that what I want?"

While some women reported that “the university shouldn’t be asking us to make the choice to miss such important things” (Katie), resulting in “weird intersections of your professional and family life”

(Amelia), all women reported being in constant conflict and torn between subject positions and roles, leaving some women to feel as though "I'm useless, I'm worthless, I'm stupid" (Kimberly). The women's subject positions as paid workers and mothers were constantly shifting, with women saying "It's like work and life for me are not separate domains. Like they are totally integrated, and they are constantly bleeding into one another (Amelia), and others recognising that "I still wouldn't call it 50/50" (Rebecca). Similarly, as Kathleen says below,

"Last week I was really, really unwell, and I worked every day, even though I did it from home... One of the kids gets sick, no worries, I'll be online, I'll look after them. So, when I'm there, I'm not there, and that really upsets me. Like, this whole, you know, I'm there looking after them, but I'm actually doing this other role".

Other women explained that "when I get home and they're home, I'm there but I'm not there because I'm back on the computer. I'm working again" (Sophie), whilst another said that;

"I took the kid to Disneyland, and it was 4 July, watching fireworks, and I'm there responding to reviewers' comments for something that was a deadline that was going to happen while I was away. It was like, turn off. Just switch off..." (Kathleen)

Finally, one woman rather ironically described the moment she "had it all" – an onerous and exhausting task of occupying both subject positions at the same time.

"It's called having it all. I remember when I went to - when I was in my first year and I

was still PhD-ing and all my PhD research was needing to come out. I went to my third I think international conference with a breast pump and an esky because I needed - because she was at home, and she was sick as a dog and I left her with my Mum luckily. I just went, I have to go because I have to present the statistics from my PhD and I remember having a moment of, okay, this is called having it all..." (Catherine)

FORMAL AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Many mothers across the focus groups described the process of applying for support as time consuming, "bureaucratic", and "utterly counterproductive"; which is a hallmark of neo-liberalism and the marketised academy. The impact of this bureaucracy on the mothers was considerable; many reported having to forgo at least one of their support entitlements, as they simply did not have the time to complete the necessary paperwork at the same time as managing their mothering responsibilities and academic research/teaching commitments.

In the survey, almost all academic mothers (90% overall; 85% of sessional & contract staff vs. 92% of continuing staff) reported that there were career opportunities available to them that they were unable to accept due to their parenting commitments. These opportunities most often related to attending conferences and engaging in professional development schemes. However, the majority of academic mothers (66% across both sessional/contract and continuing staff) felt that there are things that the university could do for them to make it possible for them to accept career progressing opportunities, including: providing

funding for child(ren)/partner(s) to attend conferences and professional development opportunities, where such support would make a “massive difference”; offering formal and informal mentoring for mothers from a “positive role model”; increasing the access to, and flexibility of, campus childcare; and the scheduling of work events at times that are mindful of mothers’ caring responsibilities.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT WHEN WOMEN HAVE A CHILD

The most common institutional supports that academic mothers were aware of included maternity leave (89%) and adoption leave (55%). However, when asked to identify awareness of institutional supports available to parents, results show strong evidence of a disconnect between formal institutional support policies and mothers’ awareness and adoption of such supports. Many mothers were unsure about antenatal leave (61%), the availability of fathers’ leave arrangements at their institution (59%), foster leave (58%), and partner leave (43%).

Table 1. Percentages of staff unsure of institutional support when having a child

	All staff	Sessional & contract	Ongoing
Antenatal leave	61	64	58
Fathers’ leave arrangements at their institution	59	64	56
Foster leave	58	59	57
Partner leave	43	56	35

Table 1 breaks down these findings by sessional and contract staff versus ongoing staff. Overall, there is a greater proportion of sessional and contract staff that are unsure of these institutional supports when having a child as compared to the ongoing staff.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT WHEN WOMEN RETURNING TO WORK

On the one hand, the majority of academic mothers were aware of the availability of flexible working hours (80%), adapting start and finish times at work (72%), and changing from full-time to part time work (69%).

Table 2. Percentages of staff unsure of institutional support when returning to work

	All staff	Sessional & contract	Ongoing
Phased return to work	61	74	55
Formal mentoring	55	67	47
Informal mentoring	54	66	49
Reduced hours	49	60	42
Flexible teaching hours	49	63	41
Job sharing	48	51	46
Lactation breaks	44	52	40
Decreased hours of work	43	36	46
Purchase additional leave schemes	72	73	71

On the other hand, most academic mothers were unsure about the availability of phased return to work (61%), formal mentoring (55%), informal mentoring (54%), reduced hours (49%), flexible teaching hours (49%), job sharing (48%), lactation breaks (44%), decreased hours of work (43%), and opportunities to purchase additional leave schemes (72%). Again, there is a greater proportion of sessional and contract staff that are unsure of these institutional supports they may access when returning to work from maternity leave as compared to the ongoing staff (see Table 2).

FLEXIBLE WORK: A NECESSARY POLICY WITH UNINTENTIONAL GENDERED CONSEQUENCES

The majority of academic mothers adopted flexible working hours (78%), with most changing start and finish times to meet caring needs (80%), and/or working remotely (73%). The sessional and contract staff tended to also adopt these flexible work practices at slightly higher proportions as compared to ongoing staff (see Table 3).

Table 3. Percentages of staff adopting flexible work practices

	All staff	Sessional & contract	Ongoing
Changing start and finish times within hours of work	80	81	79
Flexible working hours	78	81	75
Remote working arrangements	73	77	71

These flexible work arrangements were positioned by academic mothers as necessary to effectively negotiate their roles and pursue a fulfilling career, however women pointed out that such arrangements can have unintentional negative consequences. These include: a never-ending workload; a blurring of the boundaries between work and home; a gendered expectation that it is women who will adopt flexible work; and a recognition that flexible work arrangements are unequally distributed across academic employment and position type.

SELF-CARE FOR MOTHERS IN ACADEMIA

While and about half (49%) felt that they make time to care for both their physical and mental health, unfortunately, 69% of mothers felt that they do not get enough sleep. Table 4 presents the mean number of hours per week that mothers spent on self-care activities.

Unfortunately, their days were mostly spent on domestic work (14 hours/week), with less than ideal amounts of sleep both during the week (6.8 hours/night) and on the weekend (7.4 hours/night).

On average, the majority of their leisure time was spent with their family (almost 11 hours/week), with some leisure time on their own (2 hours), with their partner without children (2 hours), and with their friends (1.5 hours). They were only able to exercise about 2.5 hours per week.

Table 4. Hours per week spent on self-care activities

Self-care activities	Mean	Standard deviation
Exercise (hours per week)	2.53	2.44
Meditation (hours per week)	0.19	0.67
Leisure time on your own	2.08	2.62
Leisure time with your friends (hours per week)	1.58	1.49
Leisure time with your family (hours per week)	10.82	8.61
Leisure time with your partner without your children (hours per week)	1.99	3.05
Sleeping on a weeknight (hours per day)	6.80	1.43
Sleeping on a weekend (hours per day)	7.37	1.52
Domestic work including childcare (hours per week)	14.02	16.17

While some of the mothers actively engage in self-care, many women feel guilty for engaging in self-care or wait until their mental health is affected before caring for themselves. This is an important issue, as described by Yaun below:

"... I think I was quite depressed and sick about a year ago and then I realised that - so in that period, I didn't realise how sick I was, like mentally and also physically because of the

tiredness of everything I did. Then I talked with my husband and he said, if you died, I'm going to have to find another wife and who is going to be like a stepmother for your daughter and won't be as nice as you to your daughter... That's the point I realised I needed to do something, help myself and I started to do running and exercises. I went for counselling service as well and so I think after a few months I was out of that. Then now I still regularly exercise at least two or three times a week and every day takes like five to 10 minutes to just self-reflect, am I okay today, am I mentally and physically healthy and am I able to be there for my daughter when she goes to college or be there when she needs me..."

The findings from the online survey shows some significant associations between academic work, self-care activities, and their mental health and well-being (see Appendix). In particular, the more hours per week spent on academic work-related activities was associated with less leisure time with their family. Interestingly, hours spent working during business hours was not correlated with any of the self-care activities.

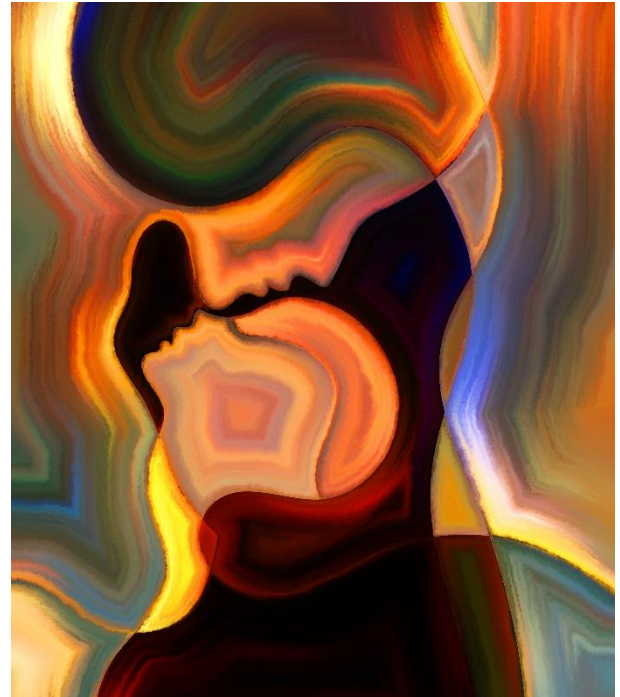
However, hours spent working outside of business hours was associated with less leisure time with their family, less sleep during the week, feeling like they do not get enough sleep, and feeling like they do not get to make time to take care of their physical and mental health. In addition, the proportion of time spent on teaching, teaching-related activities, and administration was associated with less time devoted to self-care activities (e.g., sleeping), while the proportion of time spent on research and research-related activities was associated with increased benefits:

hours meditating, hours sleeping on a weeknight, feeling like they get enough sleep, and making time to take care of their physical and mental health.

These findings are important, because self-care is associated with a number of mental health and well-being outcomes. For example, leisure time with family and leisure time with a partner without children are both associated with less work-family conflict. Leisure time with family is also associated with less stress, and leisure time with a partner without children is associated with higher satisfaction with life. Subjective feelings of not getting enough sleep is correlated with increased work-family conflict, parenting stress, depression, anxiety, and stress, and less satisfaction with life. In addition, feeling like you are unable to make time to care of your health both physical and mental is correlated with increased work-family conflict and depression, and decreased satisfaction with life.

Lastly, there were also a number of significant associations between academic work and mental health and well-being. For example, the number of hours per week spent on academic work-related activities was correlated with an increase in time spent on research student supervision, governance and administration, and a decrease in time spent on research and research-related activities. Hours per week on academic work-related activities was also positively associated with work-family conflict. Hours spent working outside of business hours was associated with increased work-family conflict, depression, and anxiety and decreased satisfaction with life.

While time spent on teaching and teaching-related activities was associated with increased depression, time spent on research and research-related activities was associated with decreased depression and less work-family conflict.



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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

WORKPLAN POLICY: EXPAND AND COMPLEMENT POLICY ON CAREER DISRUPTION¹

- 1. It is recommended that a triangulation of strategies** be developed that function together to minimize the disruption to the research of staff who are required to take a significant period of leave (e.g. maternity leave, care giving, illness, grief, mental health leave).
- 2. It is recommended that** these strategies follow a systematic methodology, and be formalized and written into the *University Workplan Policy*. These strategies serve to complement, as well as advance, the existing Workplan Policy reference that '*Optimal 3-year triennium period selection and adjusted counting applicable for ECR or Career Disruptions*'.
 - The application of the 'Optimal 3 –year triennium' is appropriate for cases where the staff member has a continuous disruption of *less than 1 year and no more than 3 years*. A systematic methodology must be developed and written into the Workplan Policy that adequately captures and accounts for **both** the duration of leave *as well as* the lag in research output

that occurs upon return, especially if the return to work is part-time.

- 3. It is recommended** that a **Pre- and Post-return to Research Plan** must accompany formalized Workplan Policy reference to Career Disruption, and must be embedded within the practices of each School across the University. Mentoring and peer-support are central to this Plan.

INSTITUTIONAL IDEOLOGY: RECOGNISE AND NAVIGATE THE TENSIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

- 4. It is recommended** that the availability of gender equity supports must be clearer, and the process for accessing such supports should not be time consuming, complicated, or unnecessarily bureaucratic;
- 5. It is recommended** that there is a critical need to recognise that gender equity supports can be ineffective when they stem from, and are positioned within, an institutional landscape that is patriarchal and neo-liberalist. There is a disconnect between the good intention of gender equity policy, and the material reality of adopting policy for academic mothers.

¹The School of Psychology is pioneering work in the specific area of Workplan Policy, with the aim of providing a blueprint for WSU more broadly.

Information on the specificity of terminology, policy implications, and process is available upon request to Dr Emilee Gilbert.

HOUSEWORK: RESIST THE MATERNALISATION OF INVISIBLE CITIZENSHIP

6. **It is recommended** that attempts to redress the unequal distribution of care-work in academia across genders and maternal status, must begin with a recognition and institutional visibility of this inequality;
7. **It is recommended** that promotion criteria include reference to citizenship activities as a way to valorise and normalise this work, and recognise its gendered dimension;
8. **It is recommended** that further research be carried out to address the gendering and maternalisation of academic work – with a specific focus on those in DAP and ACA roles across the University;
9. **It is recommended** that further compulsory training is offered for all staff as a way to help mitigate gender bias, discrimination, and injustice.

NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILIES: DEVELOP FURTHER RESEARCH

10. There is a dearth of research into how mothers in non-traditional families negotiate mothering and academic work. There is even less research on LGBTQI+ mothers in academia. **It is recommended that** further research, using the framework of Intersectionality, is conducted into academic mothers in non-traditional families.



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Appendix. Correlation table among academic work, self-care activities, and mental health and well-being

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1 HPW spent on academic work-related activities	1.00																									
2 Hours working during business hours (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)	.80**	1.00																								
3 Hours working outside of business hours	.70**	.14	1.00																							
4 % time - Teaching and teaching related activities	.00	-.07	.09	1.00																						
5 % time - Research and research related activities	-.21*	-.18*	-.15	-.65**	1.00																					
6 % time - Research student supervision	.17*	.16	.08	-.32**	-.07	1.00																				
7 % time - Governance	.15	.17	.04	-.26**	-.37**	.02	1.00																			
8 % time - Administration	.14	.20*	.00	-.20*	-.29**	-.11	.22*	1.00																		
9 HPW - Exercise	.15	.09	.12	-.27**	.16	.19*	.06	.01	1.00																	
10 HPW - Meditation	.04	.04	.02	-.10	.07	.08	-.02	.02	.13	1.00																
11 HPW - Leisure time on your own	.13	.03	.18*	.03	.05	-.08	.00	-.11	.21*	.10	1.00															
12 HPW - Leisure time with your friends	.18*	.16	.11	-.16	-.03	.09	.16	.18*	.17	.01	.23**	1.00														
13 HPW - Leisure time with your family	-.13	-.06	-.15	-.02	-.03	.14	-.07	.08	.07	.00	-.01	.00	1.00													
14 HPW - Leisure time with your partner without your children	.03	.07	-.04	.01	.05	-.05	.01	-.09	.03	-.10	.23**	.07	.30**	1.00												
15 HPD - Sleeping on a weeknight	-.10	-.02	-.17*	-.12	.23**	-.02	-.02	-.21*	-.10	-.10	.09	.06	-.04	.11	1.00											
16 HPD - Sleeping on a weekend	.09	.06	.04	-.05	.14	.00	-.03	-.18*	.00	-.09	.18*	.04	-.05	.09	.81**	1.00										
17 HPD - Domestic work including childcare	-.08	-.06	-.07	.15	-.03	-.07	-.10	-.08	-.13	-.15	-.16	-.12	.05	.04	.07	.06	1.00									
18 I do not feel like I get enough sleep	.09	-.08	.23**	.17*	-.22*	.03	.01	.05	.05	-.20*	-.11	.00	.02	-.18*	-.40**	-.26**	.02	1.00								
19 I do not make time to take care of my health both physical and mental	.15	.06	.18*	.21*	-.27**	-.03	.02	.15	-.40**	-.03	-.10	-.14	-.14	-.01	-.11	-.06	.09	.00	1.00							
20 Work-Family Conflict scale	.43**	.22*	.45**	.08	-.26**	.08	.17	.14	-.08	-.01	-.17	.00	-.21*	-.22*	-.10	-.01	.13	.21*	.32**	1.00						
21 Family-Work Conflict scale	.01	-.02	.05	.00	-.05	.19*	-.05	.01	-.07	-.12	-.05	-.05	.08	-.08	-.06	-.11	-.02	.17	-.05	.25**	1.00					
22 Parenting Stress scale	-.10	-.07	-.08	.05	-.09	-.03	.03	.09	-.06	-.08	.03	-.05	-.12	-.11	-.11	-.15	.01	.28**	.02	.20*	.39**	1.00				
23 Satisfaction With Life scale	-.18*	.00	-.30**	-.11	.16	-.02	-.04	-.04	.09	.16	-.02	.08	.17	.19*	.09	.03	.05	-.22*	-.32**	-.35**	-.25**	-.42**	1.00			
24 DASS21 - depression scale	.10	-.08	.26**	.22*	-.19*	.03	-.03	-.07	-.10	-.14	.11	-.17	-.17	-.15	-.08	-.05	-.04	.17	.20*	.36**	.33**	.40**	-.49**	1.00		
25 DASS21 - anxiety scale	.17	-.09	.38**	.09	-.05	.16	-.14	-.09	.04	-.02	-.03	-.18*	-.05	-.07	-.07	-.03	.03	.18*	.13	.33**	.16	.08	-.29**	.59**	1.00	
26 DASS21 - stress scale	.06	-.01	.11	.13	-.06	-.04	-.08	-.03	-.14	-.18*	-.17	-.11	-.18*	-.14	.05	-.05	.01	.28**	.15	.42**	.31**	.21*	-.28**	.55**	.49**	1.00

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$